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SUBJECT: WEEKLY NEPAL MEDIA REPORT: JUNE 17 - 23, 2003

- STATE FOR NP, AC, PM
- STATE FOR IN/R/MR
- STATE FOR SA/INS, PM/CBM, PM/PRO
- STATE FOR SA/PPD

11. POLITICAL AFFAIRS

-- Five parties, Maoists hold massive rallies: The five agitating political parties and the Maoists took separate rallies on Friday in the capital against the "regression". (Media reports, 6/21)

-- Nepal warns king: UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal has warned the king to quit the throne and compete as a political leader if he really wants to be active in politics. (independent "Nepal Samacharpatra," V/D, 6/17)

MAOISTS AND OTHERS ACCUSE U.S. OF INTERFERENCE

-- Maoists ask help from India and China for talks: The Maoists have said that India and China should help to make the government-Maoist talks successful. The Maoist party has claimed that India and China will be the greatest sufferers if the U.S. plans of thwarting the peace talks succeed. "The U.S. is now blatantly involved in a conspiracy to jeopardize the peace talks. The five year antiterrorism agreement with the Royal Nepal Army and the inclusion of the Maoists in the terrorist list are some reflections of the conspiracy," said senior Maoist leader Ram Bahadur Thapa "Badal" to "Rajdhani". The U.S. wants to capture the two huge markets in the south and north by making Nepal a strategic and political base, he said. The U.S. has come to Nepal to stop China and India from becoming its future rivals, he said. Badal accused the U.S. of mobilizing the Nepal army with weapons, training and other support in order to jeopardize the talks. (centrist "Rajdhani," V/D, 6/22)

-- RNA disrupting peace talks, says Maoist spokesperson: The "old regime" and the Nepalese Army are trying to disrupt the peace talks, charged Maoist spokesperson Krishna Bahadur Mahara. Mahara also claimed that a big conspiracy was being hatched with the United States playing its card from behind the scenes. (Pro-India "Himalayan Times," E/D, 6/21)

-- Dr. Bhattarai charges British and Americans: Maoist leader Dr. Baburam Bhattarai said: "The British and Americans have penetrated the Royal Palace and completely taken control of the governance. This has compelled the Maoists to fight for our nationality. The king has put forward Surya Bahadur Thapa as prime minister to hold elections. But the elections will not be held for the Nepalese people, it will be in the interests of the Palace and foreigners." ("Nepal Samacharpatra," 6/17)

-- Human Rights Service Center criticizes U.S.: U.S. Ambassador Michael Malinowski's remark that "the U.S. doesn't like the Maoists' activities in Nepali politics" has interfered in the right of the Nepali people to elect their own government. Although America has welcomed the talks, it is only external. It is actually trying to jeopardize the talks by directly interfering in our national freedom and political and civil rights. We appeal to the U.S. President to annul the recent secret antiterrorism agreement between Nepal and the U.S. and take back his troops from here. (letter by the Human Rights Service Center to the editor, "Drishti" weekly, 6/17, UML-mouthpiece)

-- Maoist spokesperson charges America: Maoist spokesperson and talks team member Krishna Bahadur Mahara said: "Foreigners are running this government now. This means the major keys of the country are with foreigners, especially in the hands of imperialists. The army is in the hand of America, it is not even under the king." (Mahara's interview in "Drishti," 6/17)

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MY-MAOIST EXCHANGE FIRE

-- 7 Maoists, 1 local killed in clashes with army: At least seven armed Maoist rebels and a commoner were

killed in exchange of fire between the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) personnel and the rebels in Jajarkot district. The army men first opened fire after the rebels blocked them from conducting a health camp. ("Rajdhani" and the centrist "Kathmandu Post," E/D, 6/19-22)

12. STUDENT UNREST

-- Striking student unions to intensify protests: The seven agitating student unions, demanding free education till the secondary level, said that they would continue with their protests including locking the educational institutions. (Media reports, 6/23)

-- School students forced to join agitation: School teachers and parents accused the Maoists of forcing thousands of students in uniform to take part in their political rally on Friday. The participants in the rally were mostly school students, neatly dressed in their school uniforms. They were "forced" to march in the streets with placards and banners belonging to the Maoists. (centrist "Kantipur," V,D, and the Kathmandu Post, 6/21)

-- Students tell parents not to pay school fees: The seven-student organization announced (6/17) a series of protest programs, including a plea to parents and students of both private and public schools not to pay school fees till the students' demands were met. The third round of government-student talks ended without conclusion after the student leaders walked out of the talks on June 16 when the government expressed inability to fulfil their demand of providing free education up to secondary level in public schools. ("The Himalayan Times," 6/18)

-- Government cannot make secondary education free, says Minister: Education at the secondary-level cannot be free owing to financial hardships facing the country, the Minister for Education said. ("The Kathmandu Post," 6/19)

-- Maoists forcing students to join ranks: The Maoist-aligned student wing, All Nepal National Independent Students' Union- Revolutionary (ANNISU-R), is forcing school students of the Kathmandu Valley to take its membership. ("Kantipur," 6/20)

13. NEPAL-U.S.

-- Preferential bill out of U.S. Senate: Senator Dianne Feinstein has withdrawn a preferential legislation from the U.S. Senate that sought to allow duty-and quota-free market access to Nepali garments in the U.S. The latest statement from the Senator's office ends "whatever" optimism Nepali garment entrepreneurs harbored. Garment entrepreneurs said that the government must immediately initiate steps to persuade and convince the U.S. Senator on the socio-economic impact of the bill's revocation on Nepal. Nepal's garment industry employs over 100,000 workers -- half of them women -- and sustains the livelihood of over 350,000 people. Feinstein's decision to retract her support for the bill had come in the wake of Nepal's "poor" handling of the extradition of eighteen Tibetans recently. However, the Nepali government had deported the Tibetans stating that they had illegally crossed over to Nepal. (Compiled from "The Kathmandu Post" and others, 6/18)

-- Government requests Senator not to withdraw bill: Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa said the government had written a letter requesting Senator Dianne Feinstein not to withdraw the bill for facilitating entrance of Nepalese ready-made garments to America, in the Senate. (Kantipuronline.com, 6/17)

14. BHUTANESE REFUGEES

-- Refugee verification report: The long-awaited verification report of the Bhutanese refugees living in Khudunabari camp was made public in Jhapa on June 18 inside the camp amidst tight security. The verification report has recognized only 2.4 per cent refugees as genuine Bhutanese. (Media reports, 6/19)

-- Verification report receives widespread resentment: Five leading international humanitarian and human rights organizations -- Amnesty International, Human

Rights Watch, Lutheran World Federation, Refugee International, the U.S. Committee for Refugees -- and the Bhutanese Refugee Support Group in a joint statement (6/19) criticized the screening process saying that the Bhutanese refugee situation has become one of the most protracted and neglected refugee crises in the world. (Compiled from "The Kathmandu Post" and

others, 6/20)

-- Refugees burn copies of verification report:
Bhutanese refugee students Sunday burned copies of
refugee verification report in front of the office of
the Nepal-Bhutan Joint Verification Team (JVT) in
Jhapa, terming it a document full of flaws. (Reports,
6/23)

15. OTHERS

-- Monsoon begins: The monsoon broke over east and
central Nepal Monday (6/16), five days behind the
normal date, the Department of Hydrology and
Meteorology said. (Nepalnews.com, 6/17)

MALINOWSKI